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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTO DOMINGO 001683

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV KCRM PREL DR HA
SUBJECT: HAITIANS SUBJECTED TO VIOLENCE AND DEPORTATION

Classified By: P. Robert Fannin, AMB, Reasons 1.4(b), (d)

¶1. (U) Summary: Longstanding tensions between Haitians, persons of Haitian descent, and Dominicans resulted in violence this week that left at least 6 dead, dozens of homes burned, and hundreds deported. Dominican authorities have issued statements condemning the violence and, while it is unclear if the measures they are taking will be fully effective, Friday did see an apparent reduction in tensions.
End Summary

Latest Flare-up

¶2. (SBU) On October 28 in the town of Neiba, a Haitian allegedly killed a Dominican in the course of an attempt to steal a motorcycle. This incident sparked counter-violence on the part of local Dominicans as a mob of Dominicans attacked a group of Haitians, killing 2 and injuring 10. The surviving Haitian victims sought refuge in the police station in Neiba and opted to return to Haiti. While the GODR claims that these repatriations were completely voluntary, Sonia Pierre, a Haitian rights activist, reports that the Haitians were given the option to repatriate if they wanted to live.

¶3. (SBU) The Director of Migration for the Dominican Republic, Jose Sanz Jiminian, traveled to Neiba the same day to oversee the GODR response. He reported that he had planned to only assist the victims of the attack to return to Haiti, but then found that they wanted to return with their families and friends leading to a number close to 200. When the busses arrived for the repatriation, Sanz Jiminian claims that he discovered about 470 undocumented Haitians seeking to return to Haiti. In a meeting with POLOFFs, the Haitian Ambassador to the DR alleged that these repatriations are not voluntary and that the deportees were not even allowed to collect their belongings before being returned to Haiti.

¶4. (SBU) Although Sanz Jiminian reported that with this mass &voluntary& deportation, peace returned to the area, the violence did not stop in other areas of the western Dominican Republic. On October 29th, a Haitian reportedly killed an 80 year old Dominican farmer in the northwestern town of Guayubin. In response to this alleged attack, dozens of Dominicans apparently looted and burned the homes of about 30 undocumented workers in a Haitian barrio of the town. The violence also spread to Guayabal and Moca where Dominican mobs reportedly looted and burned homes of undocumented Haitians. Harassment of Haitians has also been reported in Bani and Santiago.

Historical Perspective

¶5. (SBU) According to the Haitian DCM, Madsen Cherubin, and Sonia Pierre, similar events took place in 2005 when Dominican mobs attacked Haitians in areas throughout the northern agricultural sectors of the country. Following the violence, the DR was left without sufficient agricultural

workers to work their crops and the 2006 crops were significantly effected. Cherubin claims this is the reason that the deportations are taking place primarily in the southern provinces.

Accusations Fly

¶6. (SBU) While all sides agree that the attacks and burnings are real, the source and fault for these attacks is in contention. While the NGOs claim that the violence is continuing as a result of government inaction and possibly government involvement, the GODR claims that the NGOs and press are fanning the flames and making more of the situation than is actually occurring. NGOs are also reporting that local radio and television commentators in the northern part of the country are calling for the ouster of all Haitians from the Dominican Republic; however, Post was unable to verify these broadcasts.

¶7. (C) Cherubin, mentioned, unofficially, that some reports claim that there was no actual initial killing, but that it was a traffic accident between a Haitian on a motorbike and a Dominican pedestrian that escalated into the death of the Haitian and escalating violence by a Dominican mob. He also noted, more credibly, that in the reported death of a Dominican farmer in Guayubin, there were no witnesses that a Haitian was involved. Rather, he reports that the farmer had a Dominican helper and was found dead in his field, leading to the speculation that his assistant was guilty of the murder.

The Government Begins to React

¶8. (SBU) With President Fernandez out of the country, Vice President Alburquerque issued a strong statement: "We condemn any act of barbarism that could harm a human being, regardless of nationality. No one should take justice into their own hands.... We always offer protection to avoid further acts of this kind." The President of the Dominican Senate and a group of legislators gave a joint statement that condemned the attacks, stating that the attackers are taking advantage of ethnic tensions to rob Haitians. The Armed Forces told a Embassy Defense Attache that they have placed added security in Neiba and Guayabín to control the situation and media reports indicate that six Dominicans were arrested today in relation to additional lootings and burning of Haitian homes in Guayubin.

What is next?

¶9. (SBU) What happens next will depend largely on two factors: First, the degree to which the Dominican government cracks down on perpetrators of the violence. Secondly, the state of the economy could) over coming months) also have an effect. If the economy suffers considerably because of the economic downturn in the U.S. and Europe, then Haitians will likely be seen as a threat to employment and / or social cohesion, regardless of what the government does. As in the United States, when times are good economically) and they have been in the DR in recent years) the arrival of cheap labor (legally or otherwise) to do hard work in the fields or construction sites is not questioned very much. However, when the economy goes "south," laborers may become the object of resentment and nationalist posturing. Post will monitor the situation carefully.

FANNIN